

Tigerfile- Moscow conference on 1962 Cuba Missile Crisis, add 2

1/30/89

Today's Washington Post story on the press conference at the end of the conference, under a headline based on the lead, which says that the US seriously underestimated the size of Soviet armed forces in Cuba, reports that "American participants now appear ~~to~~ to accept that one of Khrushchev's primary goals ~~xxxxxx~~ in unstalling missiles in Cuba was to defend the island against a possible U.S. invasion."

The size of the Soviet military contingent is now put at 40,000 or almost four times the U.S. estimate of the time.

That the US could have so seriously underestimated the number of Soviet military on the island indicates the poor quality of its human intelligence then, I think.

If defending Cuba was the objective, which I have always believed, as my contemporaneous analysis asked, how were missiles to be fired at the US going to prevent the invasion and desolation of Cuba?

There is no way they can if there are any hostilities. Hostilities would have ruined Cuba, whatever the ultimate outcome. Were Cuba to wind up devastated, whether or not still independent, it would hardly have been defended.

There was no way the missiles could have prevented the great destruction that such a war would have caused.

The size of the Soviet manpower in Cuba does reflect the belief that there would be an invasion, and, together with the Cuban forces of about 240,000, they could have been a very strong force against a US invasion, regardless of the size of the US forces.

I think it is apparent that the purpose of placing missiles in Cuba was to discourage any US invasion. No matter how overwhelming the size of the US missile arsenal was, and it was very much greater than that of the USSR, were there to be a war in which missiles with nuclear warheads were used, the US still would have been very severely damaged, with great losses in life and the probable total destruction of many of the most populous areas. With probably more such devastation in the USSR.

Regardless of the size of the Soviet military manpower in Cuba, which the US did not know, any rational intelligence appraisal of the presence of missiles there had to be that the Soviets were determined to prevent an invasion. Any other intelligence estimate is secondary and certainly meant no more than did our missiles in Turkey, on the USSR's border, and other close locations in Europe.

I believe that once again reporting from this conference confirms my contemporaneous analysis, that Khrushchev placed the missiles there for them not to be used but to be seen and for his meaning in placing there to be understood correctly: don't invade Cuba and don't compel the USSR to meet its military obligations under the "mutual assistance" Pact.